

Twelve Guns is Better than Six

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Subject Area Artillery

Twelve Guns is Better than Six

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Former Commandant of the United States Marine Corps General James L. Jones identified a gap in the ability of Marine Corps artillery to provide fire support in the changing battlefield of the twenty-first-century and took steps to begin the initiative to improve artillery's problem. General Jones noted that "We have atrophied our Marine ground fires inventory to a dangerous point. We are out gunned and out ranged by just about everyone." The current weapon system, the M198 (155mm), brings a lot of firepower to the battlefield, however; it is cumbersome and makes it difficult for artillery to keep up with ground forces on the move. With the speed and fluidity of today's battlefield and the Marine Corps' focus on maneuver warfare and ship to objective maneuver (STOM), Marine artillery must be able to provide a greater degree of flexibility to ground commanders. In order to give artillery this flexibility, the "triad of fires" was conceived. The first aspect of the triad, the high mobility artillery rocket system (HIMARS) will allow the Marine expeditionary forces (MEF) and divisions the ability to provide shaping fires to the deep fight. Next, The M198 will be replaced with the M777 (lightweight 155mm howitzer) to continue to support the divisions and regiments within their area of responsibility. Finally, the expeditionary fire support

system (EFSS) will support the infantry regiments and battalions at closer ranges and in times when the maneuver forces are advancing rapidly. The current concept of a six gun EFSS battery may support the infantry battalions but would fall short of supporting the artillery battalion's doctrinal role of supporting an infantry regiment. By increasing the number of guns in an EFSS battery from six to twelve, the artillery community's ability to support the Marine Expeditionary Unit and the Marine Expeditionary Brigade would be significantly improved.

#### I. Examining the Expeditionary Fire Support System

Many of the original questions about EFSS have been decided. EFSS will be manufactured by France, it will be a 120mm rifled mortar, and it will be owned by the artillery community. Finally, it will be taught at the artillery training schools (ATS) at both Tenth and Eleventh Marines and not at cannon crewman's course in Ft Sill, OK. Additionally, three battalions in each regiment will receive a battery of EFSS equipment without any changes to the current table of organization (TO). Some issues concerning EFSS still remain; the rifled round is still being developed, the ammunition is not yet certified to be

carried on ship and there are many training issues. Again, each artillery battalion will receive one, six gun battery of EFSS gear, and retain three full batteries of M777. Depending on the mission, the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) commander will decide whether or not the supporting artillery unit will convert a howitzer battery to a mortar battery. A one for one swap would result in the artillery battalion having two howitzer batteries and one mortar battery.

A comparison of an EFSS battery and a 155mm howitzer battery demonstrates obvious problems with the current proposal in regards to manpower. A 120mm mortar battery will consist of six guns mirroring that of a howitzer battery. Each mortar section will have a five man crew versus the howitzer crew of eleven. Finally the mortar Fire Direction Center (FDC) will consist of one Marine per tube, or a six man section. The current howitzer FDC is made up by 14 Marines. This comparison shows that for every howitzer section a commander would be able to employ two mortar sections, and have more than enough Marines to operate two functional FDCs. These numbers show that with the current proposal for the fielding of EFSS equipment, should the commander choose to employ his mortars, more than forty Marines will be left without a weapon system to

fire. The Marine Corps must decide whether or not make the EFSS battery consist of more tubes or how to employ the extra Marines.

## II. EFSS Supporting the Marine Expeditionary Unit

Based off the tactical situation and the assigned mission, the Marine Corps has a proven history of straying away from doctrine in order to support the mission. With the evolution of the MAGTF and the development of the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), artillery is required to place a single battery in direct support of a battalion. The introduction of EFSS will greatly appeal to future MEU and battalion commanders. In the past, artillery batteries on a MEU have been deployed as provisional rifle companies and forced to leave their howitzers (M198) on the ship because either the amount of firepower was too great, or the logistical challenges outweighed the need. With greatly increased deployability, reduced logistical footprint and the adaptability of the artillerymen; EFSS gives MEU and battalion commanders the ability to better tailor their fire support to their mission. With options like six guns of M777s, six guns of EFSS, or any combination of both weapon systems, each supportable by the

same, single battery of Marines; the introduction of the 120mm mortar will definitely improve artilleries' ability to support the MEU and infantry battalions.

### III. EFSS Supporting the Marine Expeditionary Brigade

With the doctrinal layout of one artillery battalion supporting one infantry regiment, the same benefits of the EFSS may not appeal to a regimental commander. Typically, the Marine regiment fights with two battalions forward and one back. If the regimental commander does opt to take EFSS, the artillery battalion will consist of six mortars and twelve howitzers, rather than eighteen. This is a significant loss of firepower. Granted the commander gains some fire support mobility, but it may only support one of his infantry battalions. If it is necessary to split-up the mortar battery to support two infantry battalions, significant loss is made in its ability to affect the battlefield with only three guns due to their limited range and reduced destructive capability. There is no doubt that a battery of EFSS gives the regimental commander more options, but it is not clear that the options outweigh the cost of losing six 155mm howitzers from the battlefield. A regimental commander would likely prefer to keep the

firepower of the howitzers, especially with the improved mobility of the new lightweight M777.

#### IV. Conclusion

Because of EFSS' limitations in fire power, substituting one howitzer battery for one mortar battery may not seem like a good idea to an infantry regimental commander. However, this is not necessarily a decision he would have to make if the Table of Equipment was changed to allow the employment of two EFSS batteries, made possible by the surplus of Marines created by the weapon systems reduced manpower requirements. A regimental commander is, however, more likely to consider a loss of a howitzer battery if it results in a gain of not one, but two, mortar batteries. This provides the regimental commander with multiple fire support options. The result will be more accurate target weapons paring, maintaining the mobility of the mortar systems as well as retaining the increased lethality of the howitzers.

The additional burden this presents the artillery battalion will be minimal. Although maintenance and training issues would be compounded, increasing the number of mortars in an artillery battalion from six to twelve



would greatly enhance the ability of Marine artillery battalion to support the infantry regiment while having no impact on current manning.

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